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FRANKLYN G. JENIFER The 'Regular Guy'At Howard's Helm

Harriet Jackson Scarupa

FRANKLYN G. JENIFER:
The 'Regular Guy' At Howard's Helm

The sign says it all at a Feb. 28 reception for the Jenifers hosted by the University Senate.

Franklyn and Alfleda Jenifer (opposite page.)

By Harriet Jackson Scarupa

A photograph of Martin Luther King Jr. was set up in a conference room in the offices of the Massachusetts Board of Regents of Higher Education in downtown Boston. It was noon, five days before the national holiday celebrating King's birth, and about 15 members of the Regents staff had come together to share their reflections about the civil rights leader.

The first speaker was their boss, the chancellor of the Massachusetts Board of Regents of Higher Education, Franklyn G. Jenifer.

In a quiet, intimate, almost confessional style, he spoke to the interracial, intergenerational group before him of the impact of King on his own life. He spoke of how King had responded to a "calling" to leadership; of how King's vision of leadership embraced a belief that "injustice anywhere in this world impacts us all everywhere;" of how King's life serves as a marker that "the most important thing we all can work for is the satisfaction we've helped somebody, that we've left things in this world a little better."

"So, I guess I can summarize it by saying he is clearly the person who is my hero," Jenifer said. Then, he added something else about his hero: "Most of all, he was unpretentious. Although, he was a genius in his own right, you could never tell it by the way he carried himself. He didn't act as if he were above other people . . . He was a regular guy."

A regular guy. It's a description that could apply equally to Franklyn Green Jenifer, who early this month became the 14th president of Howard University.

Last Dec. 16, John E. Jacob, chairman of Howard's Board of Trustees, announced the board's selection of Jenifer to succeed James E. Cheek, who had served as president of the university for 20 years before his retirement at the end of June. Jenifer, the first Howard alumnus and the fourth African American to hold the post, was selected over two other alumni finalists: Carlton P. Alexis, then interim president of the university, and H. Patrick Swygert, executive vice president at Temple University.

Jenifer brings with him well-honed experience as a scientific researcher, a college teacher and department chairman, and a high-level academic administrator.

"We offer our hearty congratulations to Dr. Jenifer," Jacob said at the time. "We wish him wisdom, fortitude and Godspeed as he embarks on this great assignment. We certainly have confidence that he is exceedingly qualified to meet the challenge."

Indeed, Jenifer brings with him well-honed experience as a scientific researcher, a college teacher and department chairman, and a high-level academic administrator. The 51-year-old Washington, D.C., native brings with him, too, a reputation for "integrity," "honesty," "commitment," "sensitivity," "accessibility," "forcefulness" and "vision," to name the array of qualities those who have worked with him through the years cite most often.

I. Being Real

But what stands out most about Franklyn Jenifer is that quality he so admired in his hero. And that is unpretentiousness.

■ It comes across in his very facial expressions. This is a man who seems to wear no masks. When he's delighted or teasing, he breaks into a toothy, boyish smile. When advocating something he believes in, he looks like some stern schoolmaster, an image heightened when he peers out over glasses precariously balanced on his nose. When he's quietly pondering some problem or ruminating on a question, often while drawing on his ever-present pipe, you almost can see the wheels turning in his head.

■ It comes through in the way he deals with people and the way they deal with him. Example: When he arrived at the University of Lowell for a Board of Regents meeting one day last January, an elderly security guard, recognizing Jenifer from newspapers and television, greeted him with warmth and familiarity. "Hello, Dr. Jenifer," he said, bounding over and extending his hand. "Where's your pipe?" The two then chatted briefly, with Jenifer giving him the same undivided and respectful attention he later gave the influential business and community leaders who make up the Board of Regents.

■ And it came across, more formally, during a series of interviews spread over three days last January. As when he explains why each year he tries to learn something practical, such as auto mechanics or locksmithing, in addition to his more intellectual pursuits. "It's probably because I have this need to feel as though I can relate to the common person."

Or when he's asked what's the major value he and his wife, Alfleda, have tried to instill in their three children and he an-

swers, "Humility, that nobody is better than anybody, that the lowest can be the highest."

Given all this, it's no surprise he has little patience with "pomp and circumstances," "stuffiness" and "artifice." "I think you are what you are, not what you pretend you are," he says. "People will judge you on your abilities. If you're good, if you have something to contribute, I don't think you have to behave in some artificial way." And if you're good and have something to contribute, he adds, people will know it. "You don't have to bother to toot your own horn."

Is this man for real? "With Frank Jenifer," remark several people who know him well, "what you see is what you get." But just because he's unassuming—and, yes, he appears to be genuinely so—doesn't mean he's unambitious. For, if there is any *leitmotif* of his life, it's this: a fierce drive to achieve.

II. Being a Leader

The same Franklyn Jenifer who says he believes "nobody is better than anybody" and "the lowest can be the highest" is also the same Franklyn Jenifer who makes no apologies for aspiring to leadership—and for being a leader. "I always thought, when I was very young, that one day I wanted to do something that would lead, to be *the* person in a system," he says. "I've always wanted to have the ball."

An article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* last Jan. 3 depicted Jenifer as typical of a new brand of leader now at the helm of many of the nation's predominantly Black colleges and universities. Among the characteristics of this new brand, it cited a move away from an authoritarian management style to one of consensus building.

Asked whether he agrees with this assessment, Jenifer says yes—but only up to a point. "I don't want anybody to get the impression I don't have strong points of view," he says. "I'm not into 'consensus building' to the extent where we all sit around and think things out all the time. I think there's a role to play for a leader."

What this means for a Howard University under his presidency, he says, is "the place will not lack for a dream and a vision and I will try my best to see if that's a vision and dream that can be changed and amended—and I'm sure it will be—by faculty and students.

"I'm not coming with an empty head. I come with some clear ideas of what I want for Howard and I come with some very clear ideas of what kind of person I want to be there and I'm hopeful everybody's going to be happy with that. But I'm not coming with the idea I'll be the captives of the students and the faculty and do whatever they want me to do. That's not me."

> "People will judge you on your abilities. If you're good, if you have something to contribute, I don't think you have to behave in some artificial way."
>
> —Franklyn G. Jenifer

He was speaking in the chancellor's office on the 14th floor of a glass tower across the street from the Massachusetts State House. With its floor-to-ceiling windows offering spectacular views of Boston and its environs, the office seemed a tangible symbol of the heights of influence he had reached.

As if to remind him not to be overly impressed by these lofty heights, he'd hung a favorite poster on one wall. Depicting people of various nationalities, it proclaimed these words: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

III. "Sweet Irony"

To some, even hearing Jenifer speak of being leader of Howard University has the ring of "sweet irony," a phrase Harry Smith of the "CBS Good Morning" program used when interviewing Jenifer last Jan. 15 [on the King holiday.] Why "sweet irony?" When Jenifer had applied to Howard as a high school senior in 1957, his grades and SAT scores were so low the university rejected him. Now, of course, he's back again. As President.

"When you were first rejected, how come you didn't stay rejected?," Smith asked him on the program. Jenifer's reply: "Well, I never thought that that was my life. *Clearly*, we were raised as kids to always think that you could reach the stars if you tried very hard. And that one setback was not going to stop me."

Clearly, to repeat one of Jenifer's favorite words, Jenifer's fierce drive to achieve as well as his style has a lot to do with his upbringing.

Before taking a closer look at what Jenifer's style of leadership augurs for Howard and something of the specifics of his vision for the university, some understanding of the journey he took to the Howard presidency seems in order. That journey begins with that upbringing and "a very, very strong, very proud woman," his mother, Mary Green Jenifer.

IV. Beginnings

By any measure, both Franklyn Jenifer and his brother, Joseph Jenifer, are successes. The older Jenifer (by four years) is the former acting public printer of the United States.

"I think our drive to achieve basically comes from our mother," says Joseph Jenifer. "She's a person who struggled and fought to achieve all her life and I believe a little of that rubbed off on us."

When Franklyn Jenifer was five years old, his parents separated and were to remain apart for many, many years before they reconciled. Times were tough, especially at first, when what was now a family of three lived in rented rooms in other people's homes, and his mother struggled to support the family on a low-level government clerk's wages. Two profiles of Jenifer [one in *The Boston Globe* last Nov. 24, the other in *The Washington Post* last Dec. 18] highlight his impoverished beginnings. Jenifer sees it somewhat differently.

"My mother would have a heart attack if you told her we were 'poor,' " he exclaims. "People get very confused. We didn't have money. But we were never 'poor' in the context that we were in some kind of culture of poverty. We had enough to eat, clothes to wear and always knew that whatever the situation was, it was transient."

Nor did the family's reduced financial circumstances result in isolation. "We had family," he says. "Both my aunts, for instance, were teachers [one a Howard graduate] and they were always around. So it wasn't like I never saw bright people and didn't know there were things to be done out there" [in the larger world.]

Also serving to see the trio through the hard times was his mother's strong faith. A Catholic, who made sure her sons went to church regularly [both were altar boys], Mary Jenifer is "very, very religious—probably the most religious person I've seen in my life," Jenifer says. Looking back with fondness, he cites her beliefs that "God doesn't give you more than you could handle" and that "things were going to get better."

They did. Mary Jenifer worked steadily, first for the U.S. Civil Service Commission, then for the D.C. Department of Human Resources, fueling her own drive to learn and achieve by numerous night school courses. She was eventually able to purchase a home for her family at 7th and Rittenhouse streets, N.W., where she lives today. "It's a very modest home," her younger son says, "but when we moved, it was like, 'We've made it now.' "

Asked if his own modest origins have caused him to be more sympathetic to the plight of the have-nots in this society, Jenifer answers, "I'd like to think that concern would have been there in any case. I think it's not so much the way you grew up that makes you feel that way, but the things you're taught by those who are around you and the values they give you as you grow up. My mother always impressed upon us service for others and not ever thinking you're better than others."

When you ask Mary Jenifer what it was she most stressed to her two sons, she answers with eloquent simplicity: "To be occupied, to be industrious, to contribute to the community and to their home, to help each other and always love each other." Of her style of parenting, she says this: "I raised my children to express their views with me—from the time they were tots on up. I never allowed them to be impudent, but they could sit down and talk to me about *anything*."

V. School Days

One thing both Jenifer and his mother recall is his eagerness about going to school. In fact, he had only one absence on his record from the time he started first grade until he graduated from high school.

Today, he retains warm memories of his elementary and junior high school days. "There were several teachers who really showed a lot of affection toward me and supported me an awful lot and told me I was bright," he recalls. And Jenifer did well, becoming an honors student.

Jenifer had first been on Howard's campus when he was three years old. . . . He applied to Howard, he says, because "it had a reputation as the very best and I wanted to go to the very best."

Helping to boost his self-esteem, and helping him embark on a long love affair with science, was a Boy Scout leader named Ernest Kirkland. Actually, he was his brother's Boy Scout leader, but Jenifer, who was too young to be a member of the troop, tagged along. "Mr. Kirkland was a very, very bright person—probably the brightest person I've ever met," he says of a man who worked most of his life as a nondescript government clerk. "He took a keen interest in me, helped me with science projects I was doing in school, brought me books. I remember the first one he gave me was a Walt Disney book, 'My Friend the Atom,' and I remember reading it, liking it and talking to him about atomic structure."

You'd think, from all this, by the time Jenifer was ready for high school, all the ingredients making for strong academic achievement would have been firmly in place. Apparently, not so. Jenifer ended up graduating near the bottom of his Spingarn High School class and his dreams of a college education seemed permanently dashed when he was rejected not only by Howard, but also by the old D.C. Teachers College.

When he's asked the reason for his dismal academic performance in high school, Jenifer jokes, taps his hand to his head and says, "Dumb, probably." Then, seemingly still a little troubled about it, he answers in a slightly mournful voice: "I'm not sure. I was always interested in school. I always read a lot, especially about science. But my high school years were not good years for a variety of reasons which are vague to me now.

"I think most students who were in my classes probably wouldn't even know me now. I mean, I wasn't very popular, an athlete or a scholar. I went to school and worked." In fact, he worked every day after school—taking a bus from Spingarn to the Westchester Apartments on Cathedral Avenue, N.W., where he was variously a busboy, food service worker and waiter.

VI. The Lure of Howard

Jenifer had first been on Howard's campus when he was three years old. His parents had taken him there to model for an art class. Later, he remembers being on the campus as a teenager, usually enroute to parties in the area. "I was very impressed," he says. "The students were always well-dressed and I thought it was a serious, scholarly place and I was also aware of all the civil rights activities coming out of the law school."

He applied to Howard, he says, because "it had a reputation as the very best and I wanted to go to the very best. At the time, of course, I wasn't qualified to do that. But I certainly wanted that if I could."

Being rejected from Howard was "devastating," he responds, in answer to a question. As for how he dealt with that rejection, he answers, "I just knew that I was going to get in. There was no such thing as 'I'm not going to school.' It was just a question of how I was going to figure the thing out."

After high school, he started working as a messenger at the Library of Congress. "I had always been taught this: 'Whatever you are, be the best that you are,' " he says. "So my attitude was, I was going to be just about the best messenger the Library of Congress had ever seen." He wore a suit and tie, made sure his push wagon was "the cleanest and

As he appeared in the 1961 *Bison* yearbook.

sharpest," asked supervisors in the various divisions where he delivered books if they needed any additional work done.

The woman in charge of the library's Air Information Division took him up on it, asking if he could stack some periodicals. He was intrigued by strange lettering on the wall—the Russian alphabet. Noticing his interest, she told him that if he could learn the alphabet, then he'd be able to learn to file books in the division. "So I learned overnight," he recalls. The supervisor was impressed, asked him to take a Russian course at the library, and not long after, he exchanged his messenger route for a better paying, more responsible job.

He also reapplied to Howard. Perhaps it was the good recommendation he got from his supervisor at work. Perhaps it was because of the results of an exam he remembers taking at Howard. But whatever the reason, the university decided to give him a second chance.

The second semester of the 1957-58 academic year, Franklyn Jenifer became a Howard University student.

VII. A Howard Student

Jenifer started out in remedial classes and initially found his studies "hard," he says. "Certainly, when I went there I had a lot of deficits," he elaborates. "But my teachers brought me up to speed, and once I was up to speed, each year I did a little better. I think the only course I had any serious trouble in was German. And in my major—microbiology—I did very well."

He had been drawn to science since childhood, he says, "because I always wanted to know what nobody else knew, to push things to the very limit, to ask the question that had no answer." He was drawn to the study of microbes, in particular, because it enabled him "to watch millions of things do something in a very small space and time span. For example, if you take one square centimeter of the human hand, there are more microorganisms than New York City has people. So you can study the ecology, mutations, evolution . . . of microbes all within the test tube."

Eventually, his interest centered on one type of microbe—viruses. But he didn't like the idea of having to kill animals to get the viruses he needed to study. [This is not to imply he objects to others' doing animal research.] "That's

when Dr. Rier started telling me I could do everything I wanted to do with viruses—in botany," he says. "I'd never thought of that before. I'd just thought plants were, you know, things to look at."

"Dr. Rier" is John Rier, who's still a popular professor of botany/microbiology at Howard. "He was a very good teacher," Jenifer recalls. "But more important than his teaching: he took a real interest in students."

As for how Rier remembers the man who is now his boss: "Sometimes you see a student and you almost can *feel* the student listening to what you're saying. He impressed me as that kind of student. And I learned, as I got to know him later, he was *really* listening. It seems like he was intent on gathering information and then he would analyze it. He came across as a very analytical kind of person."

Most of Jenifer's time as a Howard student was spent "down in the valley," where the science classrooms and labs were—and are—located. Colbert King, now executive vice president of Riggs National Bank in Washington, was a good friend of Jenifer's at the time. "I would see Frank disappear 'down in the valley' in the morning and later in the day I'd see him coming up the steps and he would stagger from all the work," he recalls, laughing. "He was a serious student, but he had to work at it. He was not one of those who just got it by flipping the pages of a book. He had to plug away—as all of us had to. We weren't 'brains,' but we were goal-oriented."

The "we" King is talking about was an informal bunch of 10 guys or so who tended to hang around together at Howard. They called themselves The Fellows. Most of them were from Washington, had to work to pay all or most of their tuitions, and represented the first generation in their families to go to college.

"We felt a real need to achieve and succeed," King says. "So we were very serious about our studies. At the same time, we weren't bookworms by any stretch of the imagination. We had a lot of fun." Among their favorite pastimes, he says, was "observing the traffic," i.e., checking out the legendary lovely ladies of Howard. "Obviously, I'm not going to tell you everything we did as undergraduates," King says, laughing anew. "Just tell your readers, without going into detail, we did it *all!*"

The Private Franklyn Jenifer

"Even though I come across as gregarious," Franklyn Jenifer says, "in some ways I'm a very private person." He's far more likely to spend his time away from the job sitting home with his wife and reading than doing a lot of "heavy socializing." "Somehow," he observes, "that never bothers her or me."

Alfleda Jenifer, who appears to be as direct and down-to-earth as her husband, met Jenifer in 1961. She'd come to Washington from "a little [Virginia] town called Montepelier, east of Charlottesville," to take secretarial courses at Strayer Business College as preparation for work with the federal government. She was living with her sister and brother-in-law, an instructor at Howard who would sometimes bring Howard students by the house. Jenifer was one of them.

Her first impression? "He was a *caring* person," she recalls. "You know, most of the guys were into themselves. He was not like that."

She was his first girlfriend. They've been married now 27 years.

Throughout marriage and fatherhood, Alfleda Jenifer says, her husband always has been studying something. "I told him he's worn out many a sofa because he is a person who can sit with a book in his hand, the television on, and children running all around and he'd be doing his work. All the commotion didn't seem to bother him at all."

With their three children all now living in New Jersey, the Jenifers are empty nesters. Their 26-year-old daughter, Brenda, who had sat on Alfleda Jenifer's lap when she typed Jenifer's doctoral dissertation, is now a nurse. Their younger daughter, 24-year-old Tracey, is an insurance underwriter who's eyeing graduate school. Their son, Ivan, 20, is a student at Union County Community College near Plainfield, where Alfleda Jenifer formerly worked as a secretary for the city government.

In Boston, the couple lived on a quiet, suburban-looking hillside street in the racially and economically diverse Jamaica Plain section of the city. Their unostentatious split-level looked like the cozy retreat it was, with reproductions of works by African American artists on the walls, photographs of the children on display, and plenty of books in the basement.

Many of these books bespoke a self-education project Jenifer has pursued over the past five years or so. As he explains it: "Each year I try to select an area about which I know very little, but about which I want to make a serious attempt to gain some level of sophistication. [A recent topic: 'international economic competition, particularly as it relates to the high-tech industry.'] Once I pick out the area, I call friends who are experts on the subject and prepare a reading list of 16 or so books, including elementary texts that people think are the most definitive in the discipline.

"So, for the first month or so, I'll read a textbook, if there is an appropriate one, and the rest of the year, I'll read the other books and write down what I read. In the summer, what I do is put it all in my own words to try to make some sense out of it in the context of why I started to look at the subject in the first place."

This, believe it or not, is the kind of thing Jenifer says he does for enjoyment.

Speaking of enjoyment, he "tends not to take vacations." "I think they're a waste of time," he remarks. "I'm interested in things that are productive. If it's not productive, I can't see the point of it."

Surely, this is a workaholic speaking. Not so, he insists. "I don't think you're working when you're enjoying yourself. I can't wait to get home to read. I'm having a ball."

Still, in some ways, Jenifer seems to have been peripheral to much of the life of the campus. He was involved in few extracurricular activities, other than attending football games and writing a few articles (on sports) for *The Hilltop*, the student weekly. He lived at home, so he never was a part of the dormitory scene. He wasn't in a fraternity. His girlfriend, later to become his wife, was not a Howard coed. And each day, around three o'clock, he would leave the campus for a four-hour job at the Library of Congress.

All in all, Howard's new president was in no way a B.M.O.C. (Big Man On Campus) when he was enrolled. Another "sweet irony," perhaps.

"There were clearly status groups at Howard the time I was there and I was not in the greatest status group," he acknowledges. "I was from D.C. and the D.C. guys were kind of considered a little bit more 'hoodlumish' or not as scholarly." There was also the color question facing Jenifer and other darker-skinned Blacks. "E. Franklin Frazier's book *[Black Bourgeoisie]* described that phenomenon at that period," he says. "There was clearly a Black bourgeoisie that was very much color based or appeared to be color based. It was there. But I don't think that ever had a major impact on me. It was something I never thought about a lot."

What he has thought about a lot, and talks about again and again, is the formative impact Howard has had on his life. "The teachers pushed very hard the idea that I had to be better than anyone else," he recalls. "It was not enough to be just good. They were training us to be the best, to be leaders."

What he got from his teachers was reinforced by his peers, not just The Fellows, but others as well. "At Howard, at that time, there were a lot of students around who were very bright and very aggressive and assertive about their education," says Rier. "They seemed to be saying, 'This is what I have to do; this is what I want to do in order to be what I want to be; and I'm going to *be* something.' "

Jenifer received his B.S. in microbiology from Howard in 1962. The fact he turned out to be "college material" after all points out the danger of judging people by narrow criteria, he believes. "I think there are a lot of things that lead to success other than grades and examination scores," he says. "Such things as a pertinacious attitude, perseverance and inquisitiveness."

More specifically, he believes his own story illustrates "the imperfection of our admissions process, especially as it relates to minority kids from urban backgrounds," as he told Harry Smith on that "CBS Good Morning" show. In getting a second chance, he said, "I was one of those who was fortunate. But there are many ... who are unfortunate. And I think this country loses a wealth of experience and capabilities because of it."

During all those years in the lab, he says, "I wasn't thinking about 'getting ahead.' I was concerned with the development of knowledge."

VIII. Onward and Upward

Jenifer next enrolled in a master's degree program in microbiology at Howard. Some researchers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Center in Beltsville, Md., came to the department in search of graduate students to support the work they were doing on plant viruses. Jenifer was interested. He was appointed a research technician at the Beltsville facility in 1962 and subsequently promoted to plant virologist, acting as the senior assistant to a senior biochemist studying the biochemical and biophysical properties of small RNA plant viruses.

He continued to work in Beltsville throughout his graduate studies, receiving his M.S. from Howard in 1965 and a Ph.D. in plant virology from the University of Maryland five years later. At the University of Maryland—for the first time—he was in a predominantly white academic setting. He had no academic problems there, he says. "Howard prepared me extraordinarily well."

During all those years in the lab, he says, "I wasn't thinking about 'getting ahead.' I was concerned with the development of knowledge. My thoughts were on finding the next unknown, unlocking some kind of immunological secret to some disease, taking a virus apart and putting it back together." Most of his work focused on trying to understand more about a virus which, he acknowledges, "maybe 20 people in the world cared about." Its name? Turnip yellow mosaic virus. For Jenifer, the virus' very obscurity heightened his yen to know more.

But toward the end of the '60s, he began to feel constrained. It was a time when the cities were burning. It was a time when Jenifer, himself, was involved in some civil rights activities, among them: trying to advance the rights of Black Catholics in the D.C. area. [He was chairman of the Black Lay Caucus in the city for awhile, his brother reports.] And somehow, things didn't quite seem to fit. "I was applying my brain, my effort and my time to turnip yellow mosaic virus," he says, "and, on the other hand, my people were in all sorts of anguish."

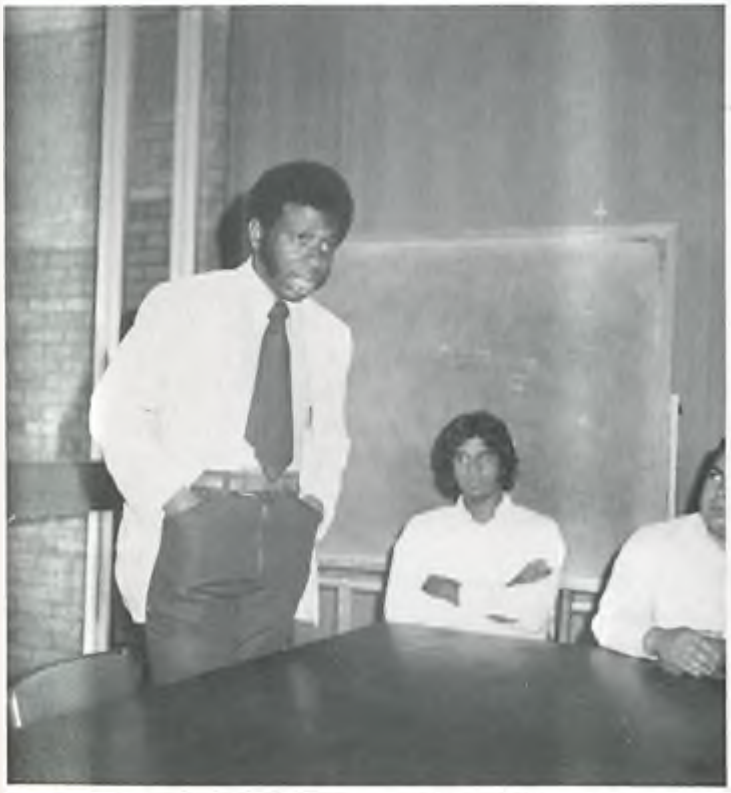
All along, he observes, he'd felt a commitment to help his people. He'd also always believed "you can't help your own people—or any people—unless you have something to give them, some quantitative skills." With a Ph.D. almost in hand and his now extensive laboratory experience, he certifiably had such skills. So, he sought a way to merge "what I wanted to do [help his people] with what I was trained to do."

His answer was to seek "to introduce young Blacks, especially those who had the same kind of background I had, to something they never had known before and that they were uniquely qualified, in many cases, to master. I thought science was that field. Science is tremendously self-fulfilling. It also has a tremendous capacity to lift a people and a nation through discoveries that are historically important and I wanted them to be a part of it."

The particular vehicle for his ambition was Livingston College in New Brunswick, N.J., a new residential college within Rutgers University. From its founding, the college deliberately set out to attract a strong contingent of Black and other minority students from urban backgrounds.

The chairman of Livingston's biology department, W. Robert Jenkins, had asked Howard's John Rier if he knew of a

On a visit to the campus last November, flanked by Howard trustee Marvin M. Fisk (right) and Marion Mann, the university's associate vice president for research, who was the director of the Presidential Search Committee staff.



As a young biology professor at Livingston College of Rutgers University in 1971

Conferring at a Massachusetts Board of Regents of Higher Education meeting in December 1988 with L. Edward Lashman, former Regents chair who currently serves as the state's secretary of administration and finance.

bright, well-trained, budding young scientist who might be interested in college teaching and who would be able to relate well to inner city youth. Rier suggested he talk to Jenifer. When he did, the two men hit it off and Jenifer was offered a job as assistant professor of biology. He began in 1970. The following year, he was promoted to associate professor with tenure and, five years later, to full professor. He also served, from 1974-77, as chairperson of the biology department and, from 1976-77, as chairperson of the University Senate at Rutgers.

"Students found him receptive and helpful, a good teacher," says Jenkins, who is now college dean at Livingston, as well as a biology professor. "We had student evaluations of different courses and he always was rated very highly. He was thoughtful, hardworking and fun to be with."

After seven years, Jenifer left Livingston to become associate provost at Rutgers-Newark. His duties on the 10,000-student campus included serving as the senior officer in the provost's office for all matters concerning academic personnel and student services. Explaining this career shift, he says: "As a teacher and researcher, I was helping a lot of students. But it became very clear to me, there were ways of helping even more. And that was by going into more administrative roles where my impact would be larger."

Within two years, he moved on to take a job with a still wider arena of influence: vice chancellor of the New Jersey Department of Higher Education, the administrative arm of the Board of Higher Education. The board oversees the state's 32 public higher education institutions with an enrollment of some 250,000 students and plays an influential role in its 25 private higher education institutions as well.

In his seven years [1979-86] in that post, "He was widely respected, not only by the members of our staff, but throughout the state government here in New Jersey," says T. Edward Hollander, the system's chancellor. "He brought with him a high degree of integrity and a great sensitivity about colleges and how they work, the collegial tradition and the way in which it is possible to shape policy in the collegial environment."

Among Jenifer's specific contributions, Hollander cites the development of a Minority Academic Careers Program, which financed doctoral education for minority students and then placed these newly-minted academicians in teaching posts on campuses throughout the state.

When Hollander's flow of praise is interrupted with a question—"Did Jenifer come under any criticism from any quarters?"—he replies: "Just the usual criticisms that one makes of someone who's a leader, for example, 'too strong,' 'moving too fast,' 'not consulting endlessly.'" "I'm just being a little facetious," he adds. "Everybody agreed it was a loss to the state when he left."

As chancellor [of the Massachusetts Board of Regents of Higher Education], Jenifer's watchwords were "excellence" and "access."

Jenifer left to take on the most challenging job of his career up until that time: chancellor of the Massachusetts Board of Regents of Higher Education. As the chief executive officer of the state's public higher education system, he had overall responsibility for three universities, nine state colleges and 15 community colleges with a total enrollment of 180,000 full and part-time students, and an expenditure budget of $1.1 billion.

He came into the post "in a storm," says one member of the Regents staff. Actually, it was more than one.

IX. The Massachusetts Experience

Jenifer ostensibly had three strikes against him when he took on the chancellor's job, notes Peter C. Chisholm, director of governmental affairs for the Board of Regents. "First of all, he came in from out of state and there was a certain group of people who always felt the best candidates for the job were from Massachusetts.

"Secondly, I think, his being Black caught a lot of people off guard. I don't think they expected a Black man to become chancellor of higher education.

"And thirdly, he came in following the removal from office of a former legislator who'd been appointed chancellor, but in a power struggle between the governor and the House of Representatives, the governor prevailed." The result was that Jenifer had to fight a public perception that he was in the governor's pocket.

Fairly quickly, Jenifer established his authority. "He started here in October 1986," Chisholm says. "I would say by the new year, the doubts were over and done with and Frank Jenifer *was* Chancellor. It was full speed ahead from there."

As chancellor, Jenifer's watchwords were "excellence" and "access." With a twist. "When he first came here, he said, 'I'm not just looking for access and excellence, I'm looking for access *to* excellence," recalls Nicholas Paleologos, chairman of the Committee on Education, Arts and Humanities of the Massachusetts House. "I've always remembered that and will remember that as a hallmark of his tenure."

It was a hallmark expressed in some very concrete policies. Among them:

- He initiated reforms to improve the training of public school teachers, most of whom are products of the state's public colleges and universities.
- He also pushed through reforms regarding student financial aid. The key item in this package: that the poor student who is qualified to enter a public college or university in Massachusetts would not have to pay for his or her education.
- He launched a major study on the undergraduate experience which resulted in recommendations to attack deficiencies in students' basic skills and to better prepare them for a multicultural world, among others.
- He tightened control of campus trust funds which had been flagrantly abused by some college presidents in the past. This was part of his overall effort to set a high ethical tone for a system rocked by a series of scandals involving college presidents.

Integral to Jenifer's role in setting policy was his role as an advocate. Again and again, he hammered away at the idea that a higher education system based on excellence and access was not a societal luxury, but a societal necessity. As he said in an address to the Alden Seminars at a Northeastern University conference center in April 1987:

"When we invest in education, we invest in human capital, and that is our most profitable investment. That is the simple economics of the matter. In humanistic terms, we are giving people a chance to participate in their economy and society. We are letting them contribute to its strength and draw upon its benefits. Education may be a social program, but in no way is it a welfare program."

As he saw it, his constituency was the entire population of Massachusetts. But in his policies, his vision and his very persona, he showed a particular concern for African Americans and other minorities.

"If you look at the initiatives he made, from the very beginning, they were initiatives that clearly were oriented to benefit people of color," says Hassan Minor, one of two African American members of the 16-member Board of Regents. Among those initiatives, he cites Jenifer's advocacy of a financial aid program based on need and his focus on recruiting and retaining minority faculty.

Terrence Gomes, president of the Council of Minority Educators in Public Colleges and Universities in Massachusetts, adds to this list Jenifer's elevation of the importance of "having a curriculum that is culturally diverse;" his efforts to "put together a policy having to do with racism and the abuse of people of color in higher education" [especially relevant in light of the unsettling incidents at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst]; and his "emphasis on institutions putting together affirmative action plans."

Within the 105-employee Regents office, itself, Jenifer was a proponent of diversity. "What he tried to do is bring in women and minorities, not because of their race or sex, but because of their perspectives and the values they hold," explains Michael Noetzel, who served as Jenifer's executive assistant. "It's not strict affirmative action, as some might regard it. It's more that he believes that people of different perspectives make a better policy decision or a better administration."

Some people in that office had never worked for an African American before. "I think it's important for white people to see Black people who can compete with them at a high level," Jenifer contends. As for how he personally deals with the kind of subtle racism that is often part of the territory when one works in predominantly white educational (and other) environments, he says this:

"If you look at the initiatives he made [in Massachusetts], from the very beginning, they were initiatives that clearly were oriented to benefit people of color."

—Hassan Minor of the Regents board

"If you approach people with an air of confidence and you have confidence in yourself because you've done an appropriate amount of homework to ensure that you're not weak, it doesn't take long for people to forget their prejudices [subtle or otherwise] and to depend on you. If you can shoot the ball through the hoop, they're going to give it to you if they're losing—or lose."

Notwithstanding Jenifer's accomplishments, stature and skills as the state's higher education chief, he also experienced a hefty share of frustrations. Some of them are inherent in the job. "You're caught between Scylla [a sea monster] and Charybdis [a whirlpool] all the time," explains legislator Nicholas Paleologos, using a reference from Greek mythology, as befitting his ancestry. "On the one hand, you have the presidents of the colleges and universities who feel you're not moving fast enough, and, on the other hand, you have the governor and the legislature who occasionally think you're moving too fast. And you have to negotiate those troubled waters, and he did, with skill and good humor and great vision."

The other frustration—and it was major—stemmed from the fiscal crisis besetting the state with the fading of the "Massachusetts Miracle," a period of heady economic growth fueled by the high-tech industry. One result of this was a huge budget deficit which, in turn, forced Jenifer to approve tuition and fee hikes, institute hiring freezes and even to be faced with a unsuccessful legislative proposal to do away with the Board of Regents entirely as a cost-saving measure.

"The bottom fell out," Jenifer says. "That hurt because it meant we didn't have money to fund many of the policies we established. They are still awaiting their full implementation." [They have, though, been partially implemented.]

Some presidents and others in the system accused Jenifer of not being vigorous enough in fighting the budget cuts being pushed by the governor's office. He begged to differ, as he did in this bit of testiness, as reported last year in a Nov. 24 article in *The Boston Globe:*

"When the cuts came down, we were asked to give back 700 positions and $35 million. We didn't give back 700 positions, and we got the $35 million reduced to $25 million. Who do they [his critics] think got it? God?"

To further show his concern, last spring he turned down a $12,000 merit increase, which would have been a very nice addition to his $100,000 salary. "You've got to take a moral position sometimes," he says of this action. "I don't believe you can ask students to pay more for their education—not only pay more, but get less—and at the same time put money in your own pocket.

"But more than that, I thought I needed to make a statement to the other administrators in the system that we needed to think about the students and I couldn't make that statement unless I gave an example. I wanted other people to not be greedy when we have students hurting somewhere."

It is because of such an answer, among other reasons, that Jenifer left Massachusetts with a strong contingent of admirers.

At that Board of Regents meeting at the University of Lowell, Paul Tsongas, the former U.S. senator who serves as the board's chairman, updated the group on activities surrounding the search for a

Addressing the faculty at the University Senate welcoming reception

new chancellor. "If you notice," he said, "the advertisement is a description of Frank Jenifer. That's what we hope to get."

He later elaborated, "I think we want somebody just like him, a) because of his own personal standards of excellence, which are very important, and b) because he's someone who is concerned about not just the university system but about the whole K-12 [kindergarten through 12th grade] system that feeds into it. So those would be at least two of the issues we'd like to see continued."

Another of Jenifer's champions is a man whom the press sometimes painted as at loggerheads with him, L. Edward Lashman, the state's secretary of administration and finance whose job it is to press for budget cuts. His testimony: "Frank Jenifer is probably one of the people I most admire in all this world—bar none. He's smart, he cares about what he's doing, he's very good at what he does and he's probably more knowledgeable about issues that affect higher education than anybody I've ever met in my life. He's also probably one of the most skilled and one of the most effective and one of the most able negotiators I've ever worked with."

Jenifer also had his share of detractors. "I think the criticisms you would get about him would come from [college and university] presidents who would argue that they wanted a more decentralized system and that too much power was taken by the Regents and him as chancellor," observes Tsongas. "These are sort of sub rosa conversations; there are no quotes in the paper, nothing like that."

Another criticism came from those who resented Jenifer's decision to move on to Howard at a time when Massachusetts is experiencing such tough times. A case in point: An editorial in the Worcester (Mass.) *Telegram & Gazette* last Dec. 21, stated that "'the man who was to have made a difference in Massachusetts public higher education has moved on to the next rung of his career ladder."

Jenifer professes to feel no great guilt about the timing of his exit from Massachusetts. "I absolutely believe that the policies you create in the good times will carry you through the bad times," he says.

Still, he would not have left the chancellor's job when he did "had it not been for the call of my alma mater," as he told a Boston television reporter during a sort of "farewell" interview last January.

With the return to the institution that so profoundly shaped his development, Franklyn Jenifer has, yes, come "home."

"Home" is Howard University with its 18 schools and colleges, four campuses, some 12,000 students, a current annual operating budget of $420.3 million, and such "extras" as a hospital, television station, radio station, hotel and publishing house.

He believes Howard should provide for its students a broad-based education . . . but within that broad base, it should carve out special areas of expertise that are unique to it.

X. A Vision for Howard

Jenifer stood before a podium at a press conference on the Howard campus last Dec. 16 and spoke some heartfelt words:

"It is, indeed, my pleasure and honor to accept this position, to accept the presidency. I am humbled by it, but challenged by the future." He also said this:

"I believe we must be about the business of putting Howard on the front burner of educational players in the United States. There are major, major issues facing this nation. We talk about them all the time. We talk about the situation in this country in which our economic development and our actual economic life is going to be dependent on an educated workforce. At the same time, we talk about how the 18-to-24-year-old population, the people who will fill those jobs, is going to be increasingly composed of minority people.

"Clearly, if we're going to have well-trained minorities, it is going to be incumbent on higher education to ensure that those individuals are there. There is no other institution in this country that even begins to compare to Howard University in terms of its capacity to produce those kinds of individuals."

Speaking with uncharacteristically formal tones in an interview about four weeks later, he gave this reason for wanting to be Howard's president:

"Howard presents itself and its potential leader with a rare opportunity to further develop an institution that I honestly believe will be the centerpiece for social equity and change in this nation—both from a scholarly and social point of view. I don't think any other institution can accomplish that. So, I find it is a unique job which uniquely fits my interests and skills."

Less formally, he adds this: "I want Howard to be the place in the country that all Black people feel is their home, their little piece of Earth. I want them to feel that Howard is *theirs*."

And this: "I want Howard to make a difference. I want everybody to know Howard. I want people to be able to point to the person who emerges from here and be able to say, 'That's a Howard man or that's a Howard woman.' That's my dream and I think only a Howard person can understand that."

Jenifer believes Howard needs to be "excellent," of course. "But," he cautions, "my definition of excellence for Howard is not going to be looking at peer institutions like Yale and Johns Hopkins and saying, 'How closely can we be like them?' "

Howard should provide for its students a broad-based education, yes, but within that broad base it should carve out special areas of expertise that are unique to it. Given Howard's constituency and history, the natural areas of this expertise, as he sees it, have to do with issues that uniquely impact Black, urban and Third World communities.

"It is in those areas that I think people—be they Black or white—will want to come to Howard to study," he explains. "They'll want to come here because we have that unique corner of knowledge and wisdom, not necessarily because we are Black."

In no way does this imply he doesn't believe the university should provide an array of diverse courses for its students. It's just he also believes it's simply not feasible, or economical, for Howard to

seek to achieve national and international dominance in every academic area. "If you try to become world-class in every area, all of them become mediocre," he says. "I think right now Howard is trying to be all things to all people."

"Some trimming is probably in order. And I think that has to be orderly; it has to be consistent with our identity as a comprehensive university; but it also has to be cognizant of the fact that since you can't be excellent in all areas, you've got to define those areas where you want to be excellent."

More precisely defining those areas, he says, is a task for the faculty, together with students, administrators and outside consultants. The outcome may well be that some of Howard's existing programs will fall by the wayside.

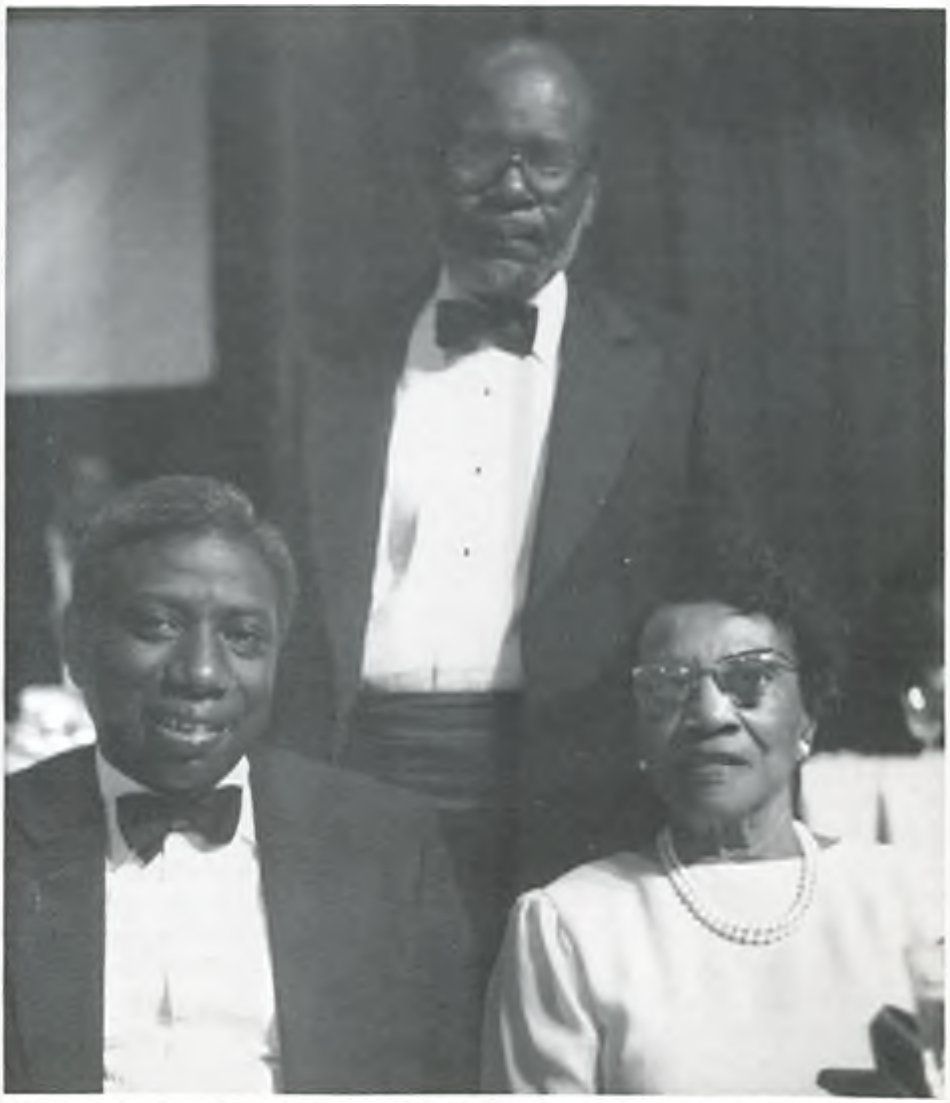
Asked if that means layoffs are in the offing, he says. "I'm not one who believes you just come in and start dismissing people." Whether some programs are trimmed or not, though, there is one category of people who will "have to go," he says. And that consists of those who are "flagrant examples of not performing up to par."

Crucial to his vision of Howard as an institution of excellence as *it* defines the term, is the caliber of the faculty. "The three most important ingredients in making a great university are good faculty, good faculty, good faculty," he said in his introductory press conference. "When some of us are gone and when the students have left and when the trustees are gone, periodically, the people who are going to be here are the faculty. And I look forward to working with faculty members and to making them *real* partners, and I mean *real* partners in the game, the life game of making this an even greater institution. That's a critical part of the agenda I've set."

"Most students are attracted to a particular institution by the quality of the faculty," he added in a later interview. "So my job at Howard, among other things, is going to be to try to attract and retain the very best people in their areas as I can." That also means he seeks to raise faculty and staff salaries where they are not competitive.

Asked about the problem of predominantly white institutions wooing away some of Howard's best and brightest faculty members, he answers: "If I had my druthers, I'd like to think they'll be

Greeting members of the university community at the Feb. 28 reception.



With his mother, Mary Green Jenifer, and his brother, Joseph Jenifer (standing), at a dinner held last February at the African Methodist Episcopal Church's Second District Convention. At the event, Mary Jenifer received a "Living Legend" Award.

scrambling to get back to Howard in the next couple of years. I hope so. I would like to create an environment that would make them want to be here." The same holds for the student who is being wooed by the Harvards and Princetons, he adds.

Meanwhile, he has some short-term priorities to attend to.

The immediate one is "to develop a senior staff that shares my vision," says Jenifer, who is himself on a five-year contract at an undisclosed salary. Asked if there wasn't a thin line between that and surrounding himself with "yes men," he answers, "I think people who share my vision are not going to be yes men. I don't need people around me who don't criticize me. I need people around me who question me, challenge me, tell me I'm wrong, and I grow from there. I can't grow if I'm just around people who agree.

"But they do have to share my vision. They've got to share that, but they don't have to share everything I do and say to get to that. They also have to have a style that's compatible with mine. I need to talk to people. I need people moving around me, not people hiding in their offices. I'm very spontaneous in terms of the way I deal with people. I like dynamism in my operation."

He describes his management style this way: "I'm very much a hands-on person, although the danger is not to be so hands-on, you slip into the underflow of maintenance. I need to know what's going on in every area because I'm responsible for it. If I don't know it, I can't judge it. So, I have that kind of need. Once having fulfilled that need so that I have a good understanding of an area, then I can delegate. But I cannot delegate without knowing."

After getting his management team in place, he says, "We'll focus very quickly on beginning the process of tightening up the internal operations of the institution in terms of financial accountability and student-related concerns, such as registration and financial aid. These are things that I want to be *operable* in a quality fashion. And I'll work on this very hard." In this, he undoubtedly will be buttressed by his own experience as a one-time Howard student. "Registration took eight hours when I was a student and it takes eight hours now," he exclaimed in a conversation with Caesar Williams, who heads Boston's Howard alumni group. "If I do anything next fall, it's to do registration right."

It's all part of his belief that "Students are the lifeblood of this institution and we're going to begin to treat them like that," as he expressed it at the Dec. 16 press conference.

Early on, too, he hopes to become actively involved in fund-raising. "I think, in the past, many higher education institutions have approached corporate organizations through their philanthropic arm," he says. "In other words, institutions ask corporations to give to them because of a moral obligation or a good neighbor obligation. I want to approach them from the argument that Howard's existence and Howard's growth will add to their long-term bottom line, in other words, that it's in their self-interest for profit reasons to give to Howard."

At the same time, he observes, "I'm not one of those who says we shouldn't get federal funds. Every dollar the federal government invests in Howard is a dollar well invested. We've just got to make it understand that a little more than we have in the past."

He's not worried about making the transition from lobbying a state legislature on behalf of an entire higher education system to lobbying the national legislature on behalf of a single institution, he says. "It's a different ball game, but politics is politics, if you understand certain rules, processes, procedures and style. I tend to get along well in that environment."

Former U.S. Sen. Paul Tsongas concurs: "Frank Jenifer is very accomplished in dealing with political figures," he says. "Many academicians, as you know, have a disdain for politics, are uncomfortable with it and will not spend time with legislators. That turned out to be one of his surprising skills."

All of which should serve him in good stead in dealing with Congress. So should his firm belief that "It's critical that Howard's president not be involved in partisan politics." Asked if that didn't imply a criticism of his predecessor in the job [who was known for his public ties to the Republican Party], Jenifer answers, almost inaudibly, "I think you could say that." He adds, "I think the Atwater thing was a terrible mistake."

He was talking, of course, about the appointment of Republican National Committee Chairman Lee Atwater to Howard's Board of Trustees last year, an action that sparked a dramatic, nationally publicized student protest on campus in March. At Jenifer's inaugural press conference, a reporter asked him, "How do you plan to deal with student uprisings, such as the one that occurred over the Atwater affair? How do you plan to diffuse those kinds of situations?"

"I'm not sure of all the history of the events," Jenifer admitted. "What I would like to think is that we will create an avenue by which students can feel very certain that there's an opportunity for them to express themselves on issues. And that should be an informal process and it should be a formal process. We need to look at the governance structure of the university to ensure that students and faculty play a much more substantial role in the development of policy and the review of policy for this board [of trustees] and for this president."

Once the avenues of communication are open, he added, "you do mitigate the opportunities for that [a student uprising] to occur. But I'm excited about an excited, activist student body. I would be very bored if it wasn't."

Jenifer pledges to be "extraordinarily accessible" to students. "I plan to spend a lot of time on the campus getting to know them and letting them get to know me," he says. Asked if he plans such symbolic gestures of accessibility as eating in the Blackburn Center cafeteria, he answers: "I don't know if I'm going to do anything that is not natural. I'm not going to sleep on some cot in a dormitory because I'd feel very phony doing that. I don't eat lunch. Period. So, I'm not going to go to the cafeteria just so the students think I'm a good guy."

"I'll do those things that feel natural to me," he reiterates. "I have to tell you this: I have a hard time being anything other than what I am, I mean I have an *awful* time."

Asked if that means he'll continue to maintain the same unpretentious, "regular guy" style at Howard he displayed in his previous jobs, he answers: "I think so. I don't want to embarrass people by being too low-key. But, at this stage in my life—I'm 51 years old—I'm not going to change. I don't think I could, even if I wanted to." □